

Guest commentary

Tobacco message not getting through

By Laurie Thomas

What is it about the youth tobacco prevention message that is not getting through? We all know at some level that tobacco is addictive - as addictive as heroin for many people. Nicotine is the addictive agent in tobacco, and over time users need more and more to get the same feeling of relaxation or stimulation. Tobacco use changes the brain's chemistry. Then, nicotine controls the release of the body's "feel good chemicals".

Tobacco is toxic. Cigarette smoke contains 4,000 chemicals. Many are toxic, and 40 are known to cause cancer. Each time you light up, you are inhaling chemicals like: acetone (nail-polish remover), arsenic (rat poison), butane (lighter fluid), ammonia (cleaning product) and formaldehyde (embalming fluid).

Tobacco is costly. In the U.S., tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable death, killing 500,000 people each year. Tobacco use kills more people than AIDS, alcohol and drug use, murder, suicide and car accidents combined. But death certificates never list the cause of death as tobacco use. In Arizona alone, smoking costs a total of \$1 billion a year.

Only through a combined and concerted effort with families, schools, legislators and businesses will we be able to eliminate tobacco use.

If you or someone you know is interested in Quit Classes, Maricopa County offers them at 35 Valley locations. The classes are free and the nicotine replacement vouchers are available for 50 percent off. To schedule, call (602) 372-7272. For an informative tobacco presentation for your youth group, please call the Maricopa County Tobacco Use Prevention Program (MACTUPP) at (602) 372-8418.

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